

Vice Presidents of the United States

John C. Calhoun (1825-1832)

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Introduction by Mark O. Hatfield.



U.S. Senate Collection

... There are no two events in my life, in which I take greater pride, than those to which you have so kindly alluded. My first public act was to contribute . . . to the maintenance of our national rights against foreign aggressions, and my last had been to preserve in their integrity, as far as it depended on men, those principles of presiding in the Senate, which are essentially the most vital of political rights, the freedom of debate . . . it will ever to me be a proud reflection, that I have been thought worthy of suffering in a great cause, . . . the freedom of debate, a cause more sacred than even the liberty of the press.

—John C. Calhoun, September 7, 1826¹

John C. Calhoun assumed office as the nation's seventh vice president on March 4, 1825, during a period of extraordinary political ferment. The demise of the Federalist party after the War of 1812 had not, as former President James Monroe had hoped, ushered in an "Era of Good Feelings," free from party divisions. Contrary to Monroe's expectations, the partisan strife of earlier years had not abated during his two terms as president but had, instead, infected the Republican party, which had declined into a broad-based but rapidly disintegrating coalition of disparate elements. Five individuals, all of them Republicans, had entered the 1824 presidential contest, one of the most controversial and bitterly contested races in the nation's history. The "National Republicans," a group that included Calhoun, House Speaker Henry Clay, and Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, supported an expansive, nationalist agenda; the "Radicals," allies of Treasury Secretary William Crawford, were strict constructionists and advocates of limited government. Other Republicans had rallied to the standard of Andrew Jackson, a former Tennessee senator and the military hero whose stunning victory at the Battle of New Orleans had salvaged the nation's pride during the War of 1812.

In this momentous contest, John Quincy Adams had emerged the winner, but his victory came at great cost to his administration and to the nation. The election was decided in the House of Representatives, where Clay had used his influence as leader of the western bloc and as Speaker to secure Adams' election. Adams, in turn, had appointed Clay secretary of state, a nomination that stunned Jackson supporters, strict constructionists, and particularly Vice President Calhoun. The "corrupt bargain" deeply offended Calhoun's strict sense of honor and propriety, pushing him toward the opposition camp, a fragmented assortment of Radicals, southern agriculturalists, and men of conscience who shared the vice president's conviction that Adams and Clay had subverted the popular will. These diverse elements, which were frequently at odds with one another, would eventually coalesce to form the Democratic party. But the nation would first pass through a chaotic and turbulent period of political realignment, which Calhoun described for his friend and mentor, Monroe, in the summer of 1826:

. . . Never in any country . . . was there in so short a period, so complete an anarchy of political relations. Every prominent publick man feels, that he has been thrown into a new attitude, and has to reexamine his position, and reapply principles to the situation, into which he was so unexpectedly and suddenly thrown, as if by some might[y] political revolution . . . Was he of the old Republican party? He finds his prominent political companions, who claim and take the lead, to be the very men, against who, he had been violently arrayed till the close of the late war; and sees in the opposite rank, as enemies, those with whom he was proud to rank . . .

Taking it altogether, a new and dangerous state of things has suddenly occurred, of which no one can see the result. It is, in my opinion, more critical and perilous, than any I have ever seen.²

Congress was changing, as well. The Senate, as Senator Robert C. Byrd has noted in his authoritative history, was "beginning to challenge the House as the principal legislative forum of the nation." Before the 1820s, the press and public had paid relatively little attention to the Senate's deliberations, being drawn instead to the livelier and more entertaining theater in the House of Representatives. By 1825, the House had become too large to permit the lengthy speeches and extended debates that had drawn observers to its galleries, while in the Senate, growth had brought increased influence. "At the formation of the Government," Calhoun observed in his inaugural remarks, "the members of the Senate were, probably, too small to attract the full confidence of the people, and thereby give to it that weight in the system which the Constitution intended. This defect has, however, been happily removed by an extraordinary growth"—eleven new states, and twenty-two senators, in a thirty-six-year period. The 1819-1820 debate over the extension of slavery into the Missouri territory signalled that an era of increasingly virulent sectional discord had arrived. The Senate, with its equality of representation among states and rules permitting extended debate, would become the forum where sectional concerns were aired, debated, and reconciled during the next quarter century, a momentous era known to scholars as "The Golden Age of the Senate."³

Calhoun, who presided over the Senate at the dawning of its Golden Age, had reached the height of his career. Given his meteoric rise to national prominence as a talented young congressman during the War of 1812 and his solid record of accomplishment as secretary

of war during Monroe's administration, he had every reason to assume that he would one day become president.

Calhoun's Early Life and Career

John Caldwell Calhoun was born on March 18, 1782, near Long Canes Creek, an area later known as the Abbeville District, located in present-day McCormick County, South Carolina. His parents, Patrick and Martha Caldwell Calhoun, were of Scotch-Irish ancestry. The Calhouns had immigrated to Pennsylvania during the 1730s and moved steadily southward until 1756, when Patrick reached the South Carolina backcountry.⁴ One of the most prosperous planters (and one of the largest slaveowners) in his district, Patrick Calhoun was a leader in local politics; he served in the South Carolina legislature from 1768 to 1774. During the late 1760s, he was a Regulator, one of the self-appointed vigilantes whose well-intentioned but rough efforts to impose justice on a crime-racked frontier wholly lacking in judicial institutions finally prompted the South Carolina legislature to establish circuit courts in the backcountry. During the Revolution, he sided with the patriot cause.⁵

Young John received only a sporadic education during his early years, attending a "field school" for a few months each year. In 1795, he entered a private academy in Appling, Georgia, but the school closed after a few months. The boy plunged into an exhausting course of self-study, but his father's death soon forced him to return to Abbeville to manage the family farm. The disappointed young scholar remained at home until 1800, when his mother and brothers, having recognized his formidable intellectual abilities, returned him to the academy, which had since reopened. He was a diligent student, qualifying for admission to Yale College in 1802. Calhoun completed his studies at Yale in 1804. After graduation, he spent a month at the Newport, Rhode Island, summer retreat of Floride Bonneau Colhoun.⁶ Mrs. Colhoun was the widow of the future vice president's cousin, Senator John Ewing Colhoun; her daughter, also named Floride, was attractive, well-connected in South Carolina lowcountry circles, and socially accomplished. John C. Calhoun married his young cousin in 1811. The union conferred wealth and social prestige on the earnest young upcountry lawyer, but Calhoun was also attracted to Floride's "beauty of mind . . . soft and sweet disposition," and "amiable and lovable character."⁷ Not until later would he experience her stubborn will and unwavering sense of moral rectitude, so like his own.

Calhoun began his legal education in 1804 soon after leaving Newport, studying first in Charleston and later at the Litchfield, Connecticut, school of Tapping Reeve, a distinguished scholar who counted among his former students such notables as James Madison and Aaron Burr. He returned to South Carolina in 1806 and served brief apprenticeships at Charleston and Abbeville. Admitted to the bar in Abbeville in 1807, Calhoun soon found another calling. In the summer of 1807, he helped organize a town meeting to protest the British attack on the American vessel *Chesapeake* off the Virginia coast. His speech recommending an embargo and an enhanced defense posture electrified

the militantly nationalistic crowd assembled at the Abbeville courthouse, winning him immediate acclaim. He was elected to the South Carolina legislature, where he served two terms, and in 1810 he won a seat in the United States House of Representatives.⁸

Congressman Calhoun

Calhoun arrived in Washington shortly after the Twelfth Congress convened on November 4, 1811, taking quarters in a boardinghouse soon to be known as the "War Mess." The nation's capital boasted few amenities during the early nineteenth century, and members of Congress rarely brought their families to town. They lodged instead with colleagues from their own states or regions and, as one student of early Washington discovered, "the members who lived together, took their meals together, and spent most of their leisure hours together also voted together with a very high degree of regularity."⁹ Calhoun's mess mates included two members of the South Carolina delegation, Langdon Cheves and William Lowndes; Felix Grundy of Tennessee; and the newly elected Speaker of the House of Representatives, Henry Clay of Kentucky.¹⁰ They, and other like-minded young congressmen known as the "warhawks," believed that nothing short of war would stop British raids on American shipping and restore the young nation's honor. Calhoun, who had been appointed to the Foreign Affairs Committee¹¹ at the beginning of his first term and became its chairman in the spring of 1812, played a leading role in the effort, supporting legislation to strengthen the nation's defenses. Working in concert with Secretary of State James Monroe, he introduced the war bill that Congress approved in June 1812.¹² Although Calhoun soon realized that Madison was "wholly unfit for the storms of war," he labored so diligently to defend the administration and to assist in the war effort that he became known as "the young Hercules who carried the war on his shoulders." He was, as a historian of the period has noted, "an administration leader second only to Clay."¹³

Calhoun served in the House until 1817. Sobered by the nation's near-defeat during the War of 1812, he continued his interest in military affairs, opposing troop reductions and advocating the establishment of two additional service academies. As his modern biographer has observed, Calhoun "equated defense with national self-sufficiency." Toward that end, he accepted protective tariffs and helped draft legislation to establish the Second Bank of the United States in 1816. Concerned that the nation's interior settlements lacked the roads and other improvements that he believed essential to economic development and national security, he proposed legislation to earmark for internal improvements the \$1.5 million charter fee the bank paid to the federal government, as well as the yields of government-owned bank stocks.¹⁴

Secretary of War

Calhoun resigned from the House in November 1817 to accept an appointment as secretary of war in President James Monroe's cabinet, a post he would hold for more than seven years. Calhoun was not the president's first choice; Monroe had approached several others, but all had declined. With the nation's military establishment in complete disarray after the war, reforming a badly managed department with over \$45 million in outstanding accounts (at a time when the government's annual budget amounted to less than \$26 million) seemed to most a near-impossible task. But Calhoun believed that a strong defense establishment was essential to maintaining the nation's honor and security, and he welcomed the chance to reform the troubled department. The thirty-two-year-old cabinet officer was also ambitious and well aware that, as another biographer has noted, "no man had yet held the presidency . . . who had not proved his worth in some executive capacity."¹⁵

President Monroe relied heavily on his cabinet and submitted all matters of consequence to his department heads before deciding upon a course of action, a practice that assured the gifted young war secretary a prominent role in the new administration.¹⁶ Monroe seems to have felt a special fondness for Calhoun—and for Floride, who moved to Washington and soon became one of the capital's most popular hostesses. Official protocol during the early nineteenth century dictated that the president refrain from "going abroad into any private companies," but when the Calhouns' infant daughter contracted a fatal illness in the spring of 1820, Monroe visited their residence every day to check on her condition.¹⁷

Calhoun began his first term as secretary of war with an exhaustive review and audit of the department's operations and accounts.¹⁸ Acting on his recommendations, Congress reorganized the army's command and general staff structure, revamped the accounting and procurement systems, and voted annual appropriations to construct fortifications and pay down the war debt. By the end of Calhoun's second term as secretary, outstanding accounts had been reduced from \$45 to \$3 million.¹⁹ Congress, however, refused to approve Calhoun's proposals for a network of coastal and frontier fortifications and military roads, imposing steep cuts in the defense budget after Treasury Secretary William Crawford's 1819 annual report projected a budget deficit for 1820 of \$7 million (later adjusted to \$5 million). Postwar economic expansion had given way to a depression of unprecedented severity, and the panic of 1819 had left hundreds of speculators impoverished and in debt. These conditions, and Crawford's dire forecast, prompted calls for sharp reductions in government expenditures. The war department came under immediate attack, which intensified when the press reported that one of Calhoun's pet projects, an expedition to plant a military outpost on the Yellowstone River, had run significantly over budget.²⁰

Some scholars have suggested that Crawford timed the release of his report both to embarrass Monroe and Calhoun and to enhance his own presidential prospects. Shortly

afterwards, the president received an anonymous letter alleging that Calhoun's chief secretary had realized substantial profits from an interest in a materials contract. The transaction was not illegal, for war department officials enjoyed considerable latitude in awarding government contracts, and the primary contractor had submitted the lowest bid, but the appearance of impropriety gave Crawford additional ammunition. Congress began an exhaustive review of the war department, with the "Radicals" taking the lead. Although the investigation found no evidence of malfeasance on Calhoun's part, Republicans were inherently suspicious of standing armies, and even the National Republicans were reluctant to fund a peacetime army on the scale envisioned by Calhoun. Congress ultimately reduced the war department budget by close to 50 percent.²¹

The 1824 Presidential Election

Calhoun declared himself a candidate for the presidency in December 1821, much to the surprise of Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, widely considered to be Monroe's heir apparent by virtue of his office. Calhoun and Adams were friends; both avid nationalists, they had also been political allies until the Missouri crisis in 1820 exposed their profound disagreement over slavery. Calhoun, however, became convinced that Adams was too weak a candidate to defeat Crawford, who enjoyed a significant following within the congressional nominating caucus. The South Carolinian, determined to prevent Crawford's election at any cost, therefore decided to become a candidate himself. In addition to Calhoun, Adams, and Crawford, the crowded field of prospective candidates for 1824 soon included House Speaker Henry Clay and the revered hero of New Orleans, Andrew Jackson—all Republicans. Calhoun believed that he was the only candidate who could command a national following; he had been warmly received during a visit to the northern and middle states in 1820, and his efforts to strengthen the nation's defenses had won him a following in the West, as well. His quest, however, lost momentum after the South Carolina legislature voted to endorse another favorite son, William Lowndes. Not only did Calhoun face formidable opposition from Crawford's supporters, now ably led by New York Senator Martin Van Buren, but, to the amazement of many, Jackson soon emerged as a leading contender. Calhoun's Pennsylvania supporters eventually declared for Jackson, endorsing Calhoun as their vice-presidential candidate. As other states followed suit, the ambitious young secretary of war was, in one scholar's words, "everybody's 'second choice.'" Thus, in the general election, Calhoun was overwhelmingly elected vice president, with support from both the Jackson and Adams camps.

None of the presidential candidates, however, achieved an electoral majority—although Jackson received a plurality. The election was therefore thrown into the House of Representatives, where each state delegation had a single vote. Having come in fourth in the general election, Clay was not a contender in the House balloting, but he played a pivotal part in determining the outcome by persuading the delegations of the three states

he had carried (Ohio, Kentucky and Missouri) to vote for Adams. These three western states, as well as New York, after heavy lobbying by Clay and Massachusetts Representative Daniel Webster, gave Adams the margin he needed to defeat Jackson. Clay's maneuvering and his subsequent appointment as Adams' secretary of state deeply offended Calhoun, nudging him toward the Jackson camp.²² He "would probably have coalesced with the Jacksonians in any event," one scholar of the period has surmised, since South Carolina and Pennsylvania, the two states crucial to Calhoun's abortive presidential strategy, had gone for Jackson.²³ But politics alone could not fully account for Calhoun's shift. He knew that the Kentucky legislature had expressly instructed its delegation to vote for Jackson, who had run second to Clay in the general election. Yet, at Clay's urging, the Kentuckians had cast their state's vote for Adams, who had received few, if any, popular votes in the state. "Mr. Clay has made the Prest [President] against the voice of his constituents," Calhoun confided to a friend, "and has been rewarded by the man elevated by him by the first office in his gift, the most dangerous stab, which the liberty of this country has ever received."²⁴

The Senate Examines the Role of the Presiding Officer

Wholly lacking in experience as a presiding officer, Calhoun prepared himself for his new responsibilities by studying Jefferson's *Manual of Parliamentary Practice* and other parliamentary authorities.²⁵ But even this rigorous course of study could not adequately prepare him for the challenges he would face. The Senate, experiencing "growing pains" as it completed its transformation from the "chamber of revision" envisioned by the Constitution's framers to a full-fledged legislative body in its own right, was beginning to reconsider rules and procedures that seemed outdated or impractical. As the Senate's debates became increasingly contentious, the body began rethinking the role of its presiding officer, as well.

Calhoun's difficulties began shortly after the Nineteenth Congress convened in December 1825, when he announced appointments to the Senate's standing committees. Prior to 1823, the Senate had elected committee members by ballot, an awkward and time-consuming process. The rule was revised during the Eighteenth Congress to provide that "all committees shall be appointed by the presiding officer of this House, unless specially ordered otherwise by the Senate." Before Calhoun became vice president, the new procedure had been used only once, on December 9, 1823, the day the Senate adopted the revised rule. On that occasion, Vice President Daniel Tompkins was absent, a frequent occurrence during his troubled tenure, and President pro tempore John Gaillard of South Carolina had appointed the chairmen and members of the Senate's standing committees. As one scholar of the period has noted, Calhoun made "an honest effort to divide control of the committees between friends and enemies of the administration."²⁶ An analysis of his appointments suggests that he took into account a senator's experience. He reappointed nine of the fifteen standing committee chairmen whom Gaillard had chosen two years earlier. The two chairmen who had left the Senate he replaced with individuals who had previously served on their respective committees. Of the four remaining

committees, three were chaired by senators friendly to the administration. After Military Affairs Committee Chairman Andrew Jackson resigned his seat in October 1825, Calhoun chose as his replacement the only member of the Senate whose military record could match Jackson's—Senator William Henry Harrison, the hero of the Battle of Tippecanoe.²⁷

As a result of Calhoun's appointments, senators hostile to the administration retained or gained control of several important committees: Maryland Senator Samuel Smith, a Crawford Republican who would eventually join the Jackson camp, remained in charge of the influential Finance Committee, while New York Senator Martin Van Buren, who would soon unite the opposition forces behind Andrew Jackson, continued to chair the Judiciary Committee. Administration supporters were outraged to learn that the Foreign Relations Committee included only one Adams-Clay man and that its new chairman was Nathaniel Macon of North Carolina, who had voted against confirming Clay as secretary of state.²⁸ Bitter divisions between administration supporters and the opposition forces were beginning to infect the Senate, and Calhoun, in his attempt to please everyone, had satisfied no one. The pro-administration Philadelphia Democratic Press and several other papers vehemently criticized Calhoun, publishing unfounded allegations that he had made the offending appointments after Adams ignored Calhoun's demand to dissociate himself from Henry Clay.²⁹

In the meantime, Senator Van Buren had enlisted Calhoun's support for a concerted challenge to the expansive agenda that President Adams outlined in his December 6, 1825, annual message to Congress. Adams had proposed a national university, a national observatory, and a network of internal improvements unprecedented in the nation's history, as well as foreign policy initiatives. In particular, Calhoun, not yet the strict constructionist he would later become, was concerned that Adams' plan to send observers to a conference of South and Central American ministers scheduled to meet in Panama the following year would reinvigorate the sectional tensions that had emerged during the Missouri crisis. Calhoun saw United States participation in the Panama Congress as a perilous first step toward extending diplomatic recognition to Haiti, a nation of former slaves. He had cautioned Adams, through an intermediary, that the initiative would "in the present tone of feelings in the south lead to great mischief." But Clay, an early and enthusiastic supporter of the Latin American independence movements, had prevailed.³⁰ The president sent the names of prospective delegates to Panama to the Senate for approval in late December 1825, touching off a protracted and contentious debate that continued through March 14, 1826, when the Senate approved the mission by a narrow margin. Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton later reflected that "no question, in its day, excited more heat and intemperate discussion, or more feeling between a President and Senate, than this proposed mission."³¹ Although the vice president had "no vote, the constitutional contingency to authorize it not having occurred," Benton recalled, Calhoun had been "full and free in the expression of his opinion against the mission." It was a costly victory for the administration. The United States delegation arrived too late to have any impact on the deliberations, and all but one of the Latin American republics failed to

ratify the accords approved at the convention. The president had wasted a great deal of political capital in a confrontation that hardened the party divisions in the Senate, and Calhoun and Van Buren had taken the first tentative steps toward an alliance that would drive Adams from office in the next election.

Calhoun also endorsed the opposition's efforts to curtail the powers of the executive, through constitutional amendments to abolish the electoral college and to limit the president to two terms. Although the Senate had considered similar amendments in previous sessions, the move acquired a new urgency after the 1824 election. Thomas Hart Benton renewed the initiative on December 15, 1825, with a resolution to appoint a select committee "to inquire into the expediency" of choosing the president and vice president "by a direct vote of the People, in districts." Other senators suggested amendments to provide for the election of the president and vice president "without the intervention of the Senate or House of Representatives" and to "prohibit the appointment of any Member of Congress to any office of honor or trust under the United States during the term for which such Senator or Representative should have been elected." The latter proposal represented an obvious slap at Secretary of State Henry Clay, who had resigned from the House to take the executive post.

Calhoun appointed Benton chairman of the select committee, which the Senate directed to determine "the best, most preferable, and safest mode in regard to such elections." Benton was pleased that the other members of the nine-man select committee "were . . . carefully selected, both geographically as coming from different sections of the Union, and personally and politically as being friendly to the object." Only one, Senator John Holmes of Maine, was an Adams man. Calhoun had appointed the administration's most vocal critics to the committee, which reported to the Senate on January 19, 1826, a constitutional amendment calling for the direct election of the president and vice president. Calhoun confided to a correspondent that he expected the administration to resist "all attempts that can limit or counteract the effects of patronage. They will in particular resist any amendment of the Constitution," he predicted, "which will place the Presl [Presidential] election in the hands of the voters, where patronage can have little, or no effect." As for Calhoun, he promised that "no one who knows me, can doubt where I will be found."⁸²

The constitutional debate over the select committee's report took an unexpected turn on March 30, 1826, when Virginia Senator John Randolph rose to address the Senate after North Carolina Senator John Branch offered a resolution protesting the president's appointment of ministers to the Panama Congress "without the advice and consent of the Senate." Randolph was a diehard "Old Republican," a strict constructionist and a resolute opponent of change in any form. Stubbornly clinging to the customs, attire, and rhetoric of a bygone era, he regarded any departure from the dicta of the Founding Fathers as tantamount to heresy. Calhoun thought him "highly talented, eloquent, severe and eccentric," while others, alternately amused and offended by his rambling and caustic speeches, his eighteenth-century dress and manners, and his bizarre behavior, dismissed

him as thoroughly insane. His March 30 address was vintage Randolph: a disjointed litany of personal grievances interspersed with his objections to the administration, the Panama Congress, and the "practice . . . that the Secretary of State shall succeed the President." Calhoun remained silent as the agitated Virginian took Adams to task for elevating patronage above patriotism—"buying us up with our own money"—and suggested that Clay had "manufactured" the invitation to the Panama Congress. Even Randolph's likening of Adams and Clay to "Blifful and Black George," two unsavory characters from the popular novel, *Tom Jones*, brought no rebuke from the chair.³³ After Randolph ended his harangue, the Senate turned to the select committee report. Randolph, trumpeting his opposition "to all amendments to the Constitution," moved to table the report. New Jersey Senator Mahlon Dickerson, who had spoken at great length the previous day in support of his own proposal to limit the president to two terms in office, prepared to speak in opposition to Randolph's motion. He had just started to explain his position when Calhoun cut him short, ruling him out of order on the grounds that "the motion now pending . . . did not admit of debate." Randolph added that "it is unreasonable, after having spoken an hour and thirty-five minutes [the previous day], to speak again to-day" and explained that he would oppose any effort to amend the Constitution. When Dickerson attempted to respond to Randolph's remarks, Calhoun ruled him out of order a second time. Randolph finally agreed to Dickerson's request to postpone the discussion until the next day, bringing the awkward exchange to an end. On April 3, 1826, the Senate approved the select committee's amendment providing for the direct election of the president and vice president.³⁴

Fallout from the explosive session of March 30, 1826, would haunt Calhoun for the remainder of his term. Deeply offended at Randolph's charges, Clay demanded a duel with the Virginian. The resulting nerve-wracking but bloodless encounter ended with a handshake after two exchanges of fire. Those who had expressed amusement at Randolph's March 30 performance, or agreed with him in principle, were suddenly sobered at the thought that the vice president's failure to restrain an intemperate senator had resulted in a near-tragedy.³⁵ Calhoun's enemies criticized him for twice calling the sedate and congenial Dickerson to order while permitting Randolph to vent his spleen at will. In the following weeks the Senate, for the first time in its history, attempted to define the vice president's legislative duties and responsibilities.

In the decade prior to 1826, the Senate had paid increasing attention to organizational matters, a clear indication of its increased workload, enlarged membership, and heightened importance as a national forum. It had established standing committees in 1816, revised its rules in 1820, and required the publication of regular financial reports by the secretary of the Senate after 1823. The body also enhanced the powers of the chair. Not only had it authorized the presiding officer in 1823 to appoint members of standing and select committees, but in 1824 it also directed the presiding officer to "examine and correct the Journals, before they are read," and to "have the regulation of such parts of the Capitol . . . as are . . . set apart for the use of the Senate and its officers."³⁶ These changes reflect an institution in transition, conscious of its changing role in a rapidly altering

political environment. After the March 30, 1826, spectacle, however, any discussion of Senate rules inevitably invited comment on the vice president's legislative duties and on Calhoun's conduct as president of the Senate.

On April 13, 1826, John Randolph offered a motion to rescind "so much of the new rules of this House, which give to the presiding officer of this body the appointment of its committees, and the control over the Journal of its proceedings." The debate continued on April 15, as several Calhoun supporters, including Van Buren, reviewed "the considerations that had led the Senate" to change its rules in 1823 and 1824." The fragmentary published accounts in the *Register of Debates* suggest that, when the Senate vested in the presiding officer the power to appoint committees, it had done so assuming that the president pro tempore would actually make the selections—a reasonable assumption when the debilitated Daniel D. Tompkins served as vice president. Randolph's cryptic remarks on April 12, when he notified the Senate that he would propose the rules changes on the following day, also hint that the Senate had given the presiding officer the responsibility of supervising the *Journal* because the secretary of the Senate had been negligent in performing this important task.

The reporter who followed the April 15 debate was careful to note that "the gentlemen who favored the present motion, as well as the one who offered it, disclaimed the remotest intention to impute to the Vice President an improper exercise of the duties devolved on him by the rules." But the debate took a personal turn after Randolph, sensitive to mounting and widespread criticism of Calhoun for failing to stifle his recent outburst, asserted that "it is not the duty, nor the right, of the President of the Senate to call a member to order." That right, Randolph argued, was reserved to members of the Senate. At the conclusion of the debate, the Senate voted, by overwhelming margins, to resume its former practice of selecting committee members by ballot, and "to take from the President of the Senate, the control over the Journal of the Proceedings."³⁷

Some contemporary observers, as well as modern day scholars, have interpreted the April 15 vote as a pointed rebuke of a vice president who had exceeded his authority and offended the Senate. On the other hand, the caveats of Van Buren and opposition senators suggest that, although some senators may well have intended to curtail Calhoun's authority, others were animated by concern for maintaining the Senate's institutional prerogatives. Calhoun, edging toward the strict constructionist stance he would champion in later years, seems to have approved of the changes, or at least to have accepted them with his customary grace. "[N]o power ought to be delegated which can be fairly exercised by the constituent body," he agreed shortly after the vote, "and . . . none ought ever to be delegated, but to responsible agents . . . and I should be inconsistent with myself, if I did not give my entire assent to the principles on which the rules in question have been rescinded." Calhoun did bristle, however, at the suggestion that he had been negligent in not calling Randolph to order. He had diligently studied the Senate's rules, he informed the senators, and had concluded that, although the chair could issue rulings on procedural matters, "the right to *call to order*, on questions touching the *latitude or*

freedom of debate, belongs exclusively to the members of this body, and not to the Chair. The power of the presiding officer . . . is an appellate power only; and . . . the duties of the Chair commence when a Senator is called to order by a Senator." He had been elected vice president by "the People," he reminded the Senate, and "he had laid it down as an invariable rule, to assume no power in the least degree doubtful."³⁸

The debate over the vice president's role in the Senate continued a month later on May 18. A select committee chaired by Randolph that had been appointed "to take into consideration the present arrangement of the Senate chamber," reported a resolution that would make access to the Senate floor by anyone other than past and current members of Congress and certain members of the executive and judicial branches contingent upon written authorization by the vice president. The resolution also specified that the officers of the Senate would be responsible to the vice president and that all, except for the secretary of the Senate, would be subject to immediate removal "for any neglect of duty." The Senate chamber would "be arranged under the direction of the Vice President, . . . so as to keep order more effectually in the lobby and the gallery," a change intended to regulate the crowds who were flocking to the Senate galleries in increasing numbers. As this first session of the Nineteenth Congress neared its end, Senator John Holmes submitted a resolution, for consideration in the next session, to appoint a committee that would consider rules to clarify and enhance the powers of the chair. Randolph moved to take up the Holmes resolution immediately, but Calhoun ruled him out of order on the grounds that "when a member offered a resolution, if he did not desire its consideration, it would lie one day on the table." Undaunted, Randolph moved to instruct the committee that it would be "inconsistent with the rights and privileges of the States" to authorize the chair to call a member. He then proceeded to castigate a Massachusetts editor for his alleged misconduct in the chamber. The debate degenerated into a shouting match after Massachusetts Senator James Lloyd rose to defend his constituent, but Calhoun remained impassive until Alabama Senator William R. King intervened with a call to order. Rigidly adhering to the Senate's rule governing the conduct of debate, Calhoun instructed King "to reduce the exceptionable words to writing." King responded that "it was not necessary to reduce the words to writing," since he had merely intended to "check the gentlemen when they were giving way to effervescence of feeling." Calhoun explained that he had "no power beyond the rules of the Senate;" if King would not comply, Randolph was free to continue. After Randolph finished his diatribe, Calhoun again reminded the Senate that "The Chair . . . would never assume any power not vested in it."³⁹

A weary Calhoun left the chair on May 20, 1826, two days before the Nineteenth Congress adjourned, in order to allow for the election of a president pro tempore, but the controversy over his conduct in the Senate continued throughout the spring and summer and into fall. On April 24, the *National Intelligencer* had published a letter from Senator Dickerson, who maintained that Calhoun had treated him with appropriate courtesy and respect during the March 30 debate,⁴⁰ as well as a submission from an anonymous "Western Senator" defending the vice president. On May 1, the pro-administration *National Journal* published the first in a series of five articles by "Patrick Henry," an

anonymous writer friendly to the administration, charging that Calhoun had abused his office. These essays, which continued through August 8, cited an impressive array of parliamentary scholarship to support the author's contention that Calhoun had been negligent in permitting the "irrelative rhapsodies of a once powerful mind" to disturb the Senate "without one effort of authority, or one hint of disapprobation from its president." The vice president had also allowed "selfish considerations" to influence his committee appointments, "Henry" charged. "From the commencement of the Government until the last session of Congress," the essayist scolded Calhoun in his August 4 installment:

order had been preserved in the Senate under every Vice-President, and decorum, almost rising to solemnity, had been a distinctive feature of its proceedings. But no sooner were you sent to preside over it, than its hall became, as if by some magic agency, transformed into an arena where political disappointment rioted in its madness.

Modern scholars have never conclusively established the identity of "Patrick Henry," although Calhoun and many others believed him to be President Adams. The vice president responded in his own series of essays, published in the *National Intelligencer* between May 20 and October 12, 1826, under the pseudonym "Onslow," in honor of a distinguished eighteenth-century Speaker of the British House of Commons. Echoing Calhoun's pronouncements in the Senate, the writer's opening salvo offered a forceful defense of the vice president's refusal to restrain "the *latitude* or *freedom* of debate." The decision to rule Dickerson out of order had involved a procedural matter, well within the scope of the vice president's authority; silencing Randolph's outburst would have required "a despotic Power, worse than the sedition law." As for the vice president's committee appointments, "Onslow" maintained in his October 12 epistle, "The only correct rule is, to appoint the able, experienced, and independent, without regard to their feelings towards the Executive." To appoint only pro-administration partisans, he argued, would have drastically expanded the power of an executive who already had "the whole patronage of the Government" at his disposal.⁴¹ These arguments, the modern-era editors of Calhoun's papers have stressed, reveal "the ground principles of all Calhoun's later thinking," and mark "the `turning point' in Calhoun's career from nationalist and latitudinarian to sectional and strict constructionist."⁴²

Not until 1828 did the Senate finally revise the rule governing debate to authorize the presiding officer, or any senator, to call a member to order. After this revision was adopted, Calhoun stubbornly remarked that "it was not for him" to comment on the change, assuring the Senate "that he should always endeavor to exercise it with strict impartiality." He did heartily approve of another change adopted in 1828, a revision that made rulings of the chair subject to appeal. "It was not only according to strict principle," he informed the Senate, "but would relieve the Chair from a most delicate duty."⁴³

The Calhoun-Jackson Alliance

On June 4, 1826, Calhoun notified Andrew Jackson that he would support his 1828 presidential bid. Calhoun, with his disciplined intellect and rigid sense of propriety, presented a striking contrast to the popular and dashing military hero. The two were never close, and Calhoun never completely trusted Jackson. In fact, several years earlier, while serving in Monroe's cabinet, the South Carolinian had urged the president to discipline Jackson for his unauthorized invasion of Spanish Florida during the Seminole War.⁴⁴ But Calhoun needed time to recoup his political fortunes, and Jackson had vowed to serve but a single term if elected president. The old hero welcomed Calhoun's support, assuring him that they would "march hand in hand in their [the people's] cause," cementing one of the most ill-starred partnerships in the history of the vice-presidency.⁴⁵ When Calhoun returned to the Senate for the second session of the Nineteenth Congress in early December, he was relieved to find that he was not "the object of the malignant attack of those in power." He did observe, however, that in the Senate "the line of separation is better drawn, and the feelings on both sides higher than in the last session."⁴⁶ Calhoun's respite came to an abrupt halt on December 28, when the Alexandria, Virginia, *Phoenix Gazette*, an administration mouthpiece, resurrected the old charges that Calhoun's chief secretary at the War Department had improperly profited from his interest in a materials contract.⁴⁷ On the following day, Calhoun notified Secretary of the Senate Walter Lowrie that he had asked the House of Representatives to investigate the charges and would not preside over the Senate until the matter was resolved. "[A] sense of propriety forbids me from resuming my station till the House has disposed of this subject," he explained.⁴⁸

On January 2, 1827, the Senate chose Nathaniel Macon of North Carolina to preside over its deliberations while a House select committee pursued the allegations. Henry Clay, who still commanded enormous influence in the House of Representatives, played a silent role in the appointment of the House select committee, which was heavily weighted against Calhoun. Even though the committee cleared Calhoun after six weeks of hearings, press accounts of the investigation, combined with the muddled language that Clay had persuaded his allies to insert in the select committee's February 13, 1827, report, contributed to the widespread perception that the vice president had done something wrong while serving as secretary of war.⁴⁹ Some Jacksonians would have gladly withdrawn their support for Calhoun's vice-presidential bid at that point. But Jackson's chief strategist, Martin Van Buren, insisted that Calhoun was essential to his strategy of forging a coalition of "planters of the South and the plain Republicans of the North" to drive Adams from the White House.⁵⁰

The vice president, for his part, was increasingly disturbed at the concessions that Van Buren seemed willing to make to secure Jackson's election, particularly with respect to the tariff. Van Buren and New York Senator Silas Wright had finessed a protective tariff through the Senate in the spring of 1828. This so-called "Tariff of Abominations" included no concessions to southern agricultural interests, as had previous tariffs, and

imposed severe hardships on the region. Still, Calhoun convinced the South Carolina delegation to hold its fire, fearing that the backlash might cost Jackson the election and hoping that Jackson would, if elected, reform the tariff schedules.⁵¹ "[T]he Tariff of the last session excites much feelings in this and the other Southern atlantick states," he wrote to Jackson from South Carolina in July, continuing,

The belief that those now in power will be displaced shortly, and that under an administration formed under your auspices, a better order will commence, in which an equal distribution of the burden and benefit of government . . . and finally the removal of oppressive duties will be the primary objects of policy is what mainly consoles this quarter of the Union under existing embarrassment.⁵²

Jackson and Calhoun won 56 percent of the popular vote in 1828—sweeping victory widely acclaimed as a triumph for "the common man." The "Jacksonians" boasted an organization vastly more efficient than that of Adams' National Republicans, a factor that had helped them gain control of both houses in the 1827 congressional elections. The presidential campaign was one of the most bitterly contested in the nation's history. Adams' supporters charged Jackson and his wife with immoral conduct (the two had married before Rachel's divorce from her first husband) and Jacksonians countered by reminding the electorate of the "corrupt bargain." Calhoun and the National Republican vice-presidential candidate Richard Rush were barely noticed in the fray.⁵³

Candidate Calhoun had spent most of the election year at "Fort Hill," his Pendleton, South Carolina estate, supervising farm operations and, at the request of the South Carolina legislature, preparing a critique of the tariff. His point of departure for the resulting South Carolina "Exposition" was an argument that Jefferson had marshalled three decades earlier in his crusade against the Alien and Sedition Acts: that the Union was a compact between states, which retained certain rights under the Constitution. But Calhoun carried the argument several steps farther, asserting that a state could veto, or "nullify," any act by the federal government that encroached on its sovereignty or otherwise violated the Constitution. The "Exposition" and an accompanying set of "Protest" resolutions were widely circulated by the South Carolina legislature. Calhoun, wary of jeopardizing his national standing, was careful not to claim authorship, but Jackson and Van Buren soon suspected that the vice president had written the controversial tract.⁵⁴

The Senate Debates Nullification

Calhoun's second vice-presidential term was even more of an ordeal than his first. His suspicions that Jackson might pose as great a threat to popular liberties as his predecessor were soon confirmed. The president failed to repudiate the tariff—clear evidence that he had fallen under Van Buren's spell—and his appointment of the "Little Magician" as secretary of state boded ill for Calhoun. The vice president was soon isolated within an administration where Van Buren and his protectionist allies appeared to be gaining the upper hand.⁵⁵

Calhoun's novel theory came under attack in the Senate early in his second term, during a debate over the disposition of western lands, a lengthy exchange that one historian has termed "the greatest debate in the history of the Senate."⁵⁶ The debate began on December 29, when Connecticut Senator Samuel Foot offered a resolution to curtail the sale of public lands in the West. South Carolina Senator Robert Y. Hayne changed the tone of the debate on January 19, 1830, when he argued that the federal government should leave land policy to the states and that individual states could nullify federal legislation. The remainder of the debate, which lasted through January 27, consisted of a spirited exchange between Hayne and Massachusetts Senator Daniel Webster, who summoned all of his formidable oratorical talents in a passionate defense of the Union. But the Webster-Hayne debate was, in fact, a confrontation between Webster and Calhoun. Hayne received a steady stream of handwritten notes from the chair as he articulated Calhoun's doctrines for several hours on January 21, and Webster clearly directed at the vice president his second reply to Hayne of January 26-27. His charge that "leading and distinguished gentlemen from South Carolina" had reversed their stand on internal improvements brought an immediate and pointed inquiry from the vice president: "Does the chair understand the gentleman from Massachusetts to say that the person now occupying the chair of the Senate had changed his opinions on the subject of internal improvements?" Webster responded: "If such change has taken place, I regret it. I speak generally of the State of South Carolina."⁵⁷

The president, although not directly involved in the debate, was clearly interested in the outcome. Jackson sympathized with advocates of states' rights, but, as a passionate defender of the Union, he regarded nullification as tantamount to treason. When his friend and adviser, William B. Lewis, having witnessed the sparring between Hayne and Webster from the Senate gallery, reported that Webster was "demolishing our friend Hayne," the president responded with a succinct "I expected it."⁵⁸ An open confrontation between Jackson and Calhoun soon followed, at the April 13, 1830, banquet commemorating Jefferson's birthday. The event was a longstanding tradition among congressional Republicans, but the recent use of Jefferson's writings to justify nullification imbued the 1830 celebration with particular significance. Warned in advance by Van Buren that several "nullifiers" were expected to attend, the president and his advisers carefully scripted his remarks. After the meal, and an interminable series of toasts, Jackson rose to offer his own: "Our Union. It must be preserved." Calhoun was well prepared with an explosive rejoinder: "The Union. Next to our liberty, the most dear." Jackson had the last word a few days later, when he asked a South Carolina congressman about to depart for home to "give my compliments to my friends in your State, and say to them, that if a single drop of blood shall be shed there in opposition to the laws of the United States, I will hang the first man I can lay my hand on engaged in such treasonable conduct, upon the first tree I can reach."⁵⁹

Jackson Repudiates Calhoun

Even without Calhoun's intransigence on the tariff and nullification, Jackson had ample reason to dislike his vice president. In May 1830, the president finally received incontrovertible proof that Calhoun, as he had long suspected, had urged Monroe's cabinet to censure him for his invasion of Spanish Florida during the Seminole War. Demanding an explanation from Calhoun, Jackson was stunned when the vice president responded that he could not "recognize the right on your part to call in question my conduct." Calhoun went on to explain that neither he, as secretary of war, nor President Monroe had authorized the occupation of the Spanish posts in Florida, and that "when orders were transcended, investigation, as a matter of course, ought to follow." His opponents had resurrected a long-forgotten incident to discredit him in Jackson's eyes, the vice president warned. "I should be blind not to see, that this whole affair is a political manoeuvre." Thus began a lengthy and strident correspondence, which concluded only after Jackson wrote from his Tennessee home in mid-July that "I feel no interest in this altercation . . . and now close this correspondence forever," and Calhoun concurred that the correspondence "is far from being agreeable at this critical juncture of our affairs." Anxious to contradict inaccurate press accounts of his quarrel with the president, Calhoun published the correspondence in the *United States' Telegraph* of February 17 and 25, 1831, prefaced with a lengthy explanation addressed "To the People of the United States." His break with Jackson, so long in the making, was now complete.⁶⁰

Calhoun soon found himself completely eclipsed by Van Buren. After a longstanding dispute over official protocol had culminated in the resignation of the entire cabinet in April 1831, all of Jackson's new secretaries were Van Buren men. Calhoun had his wife Floride to thank for this unfortunate development. Mrs. Calhoun, the unofficial arbiter of Washington society, had thrown the capital into turmoil with her deliberate snub of Secretary of War John Eaton and his wife, Peggy. Peggy Eaton was a lively and attractive woman of dubious reputation and a special favorite of the president. The daughter of an innkeeper, she was clearly not the social equal of the haughty and highly critical Floride. She had married Eaton, a boarder at her father's hotel, soon after her first husband had died at sea—Washington scandalmongers hinted that he had taken his life in despair after learning of Peggy's affair with Eaton. Floride's reputation as an accomplished hostess, her husband's position, and the fact that both the president and Van Buren were widowers gave her enormous influence in Washington society. When she refused to return Peggy Eaton's calls, several of the cabinet wives followed suit.

Floride's actions put her husband in an awkward position, but he acquiesced in her decision because he regarded social protocol as her rightful sphere of authority and because he knew that nothing he did or said would shake her resolve. The president, who considered Eaton "more like a son to me than anything else"—and later pronounced Peggy "chaste as a virgin"—was sorely offended. His outrage was compounded by memories of his late wife, Rachel, who had suffered a fatal heart attack after hearing the

vicious attacks on her character that the Adams camp had circulated during the presidential campaign.

The "Petticoat War" split the cabinet for well over a year, with Van Buren emerging the winner. The shrewd and gallant widower had conspicuously entertained the Eatons and orchestrated the cabinet's resignation to resolve the impasse. Jackson was profoundly grateful to Van Buren for the opportunity to purge his cabinet of Calhoun's supporters, and rewarded him with an appointment as ambassador to Great Britain.⁶¹

Nullification Leader

Calhoun initially believed that his break with Jackson would only enhance his chances of winning the presidency in 1832. He still enjoyed considerable support in the South and believed he might be able to reconcile southern agriculturalists and northern manufacturers with selective modifications in the tariff schedules. But events in South Carolina soon forced him to make public his position on the tariff and nullification, a move that effectively killed his chances of ever becoming president. In the summer of 1831, Calhoun protégé George McDuffie electrified a Charleston, South Carolina, audience with a fiery declamation advocating nullification and secession. Calhoun was horrified at this development, as well as by accounts that South Carolina merchants were refusing to pay duties that they considered unconstitutional. Calhoun had advanced the doctrine of nullification to provide southern states with a peaceful mechanism for obtaining redress of their grievances, never contemplating the possibility of disunion. He had not endorsed secession in his 1828 "Exposition," arguing that a state could veto and refuse to enforce any law it considered unconstitutional, but, if three fourths of the states subsequently affirmed the law, the nullifying state must defer to the collective will. Until this point, Calhoun had never publicly claimed authorship of his controversial doctrine, but now he felt compelled to assume control of the nullification movement to minimize its destructive potential. He published in the July 26, 1831, issue of the Pendleton, South Carolina, *Messenger* his first public statement on nullification, the "Rock Hill Address," a forceful restatement of the principles first articulated in the South Carolina "Exposition." Calhoun was well aware of the risk he had assumed. "I can scarcely dare hope," he conceded shortly after the "Rock Hill Address" appeared in print, "that my friends to the North will sustain me in the positions I have taken, tho' I have the most thorough conviction that the doctrines I advanced, must ultimately become those of the Union; or that it will be impossible to preserve the Union." Once the most ardent of nationalists, Calhoun would henceforth be known as the South's advocate and, by Jackson supporters, as a traitor.⁶²

Calhoun "Elects" a Vice President

Calhoun returned to Washington after a lengthy absence in time for the opening of the Twenty-second Congress in December 1831. He had devoted the time since the Twenty-first Congress had adjourned on March 3 to nullification and to his anticipated

presidential campaign. One of the first items on the Senate's agenda was the confirmation of Jackson's reconstituted cabinet. The Senate approved these nominations without incident, but Jackson's appointment of former Secretary of State Martin Van Buren as ambassador to Great Britain aroused a firestorm of controversy. Henry Clay, leading the anti-Jackson forces in the Senate, blamed Van Buren for the "pernicious system of party politics adopted by the present administration,"⁶³ a sentiment shared by many disaffected Jacksonians and Calhoun supporters, as well.

Tempers flared as the Senate debated the controversial nomination on January 24 and 25, 1832, with several senators venting to their anger at the administration. Massachusetts Senator Daniel Webster took Van Buren to task for his trade policies, while his southern colleagues, Senators Stephen Miller of South Carolina and George Poindexter of Mississippi, took aim at Van Buren's personal life. When Missouri's Alexander Buckner rose to Van Buren's defense, asserting that only a "liar" would accuse Van Buren of malfeasance or misconduct, Vice President Calhoun ruled him out of order. Georgia Senator John Forsyth, a staunch Jackson man, pointedly reminded the vice president, "[I]f you remember your own decisions you must know that you are grossly out of order for this interference." Forsyth clearly intended to taunt Calhoun, not to raise a substantive objection, since the Senate had, four years earlier, revised its rules to authorize the presiding officer to call a member to order.

The debate over Van Buren's appointment ended in a tied vote—orchestrated, one scholar suggests, to give the vice president the "distinction and honor of defeating Van Buren's nomination." Calhoun, as expected, cast his vote against the nomination, a decision that, Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton predicted, "elected a Vice President."⁶⁴ But Benton was only partially correct. Rigid in defense of his principles, but wholly lacking the abundant political skills of the "Little Magician," Calhoun had played into Van Buren's hands throughout his second term as vice president. His decision to assume control of the South Carolina nullification movement had already killed his presidential prospects. Van Buren would become the Democratic vice-presidential candidate in 1832 and would succeed Jackson as president four years later.

Calhoun spent the remainder of the year in the Senate disheartened by the enactment of the 1832 tariff. That measure was intended to reconcile northern manufacturers and all but the most diehard free traders, but, in one scholar's assessment, it "satisfied neither protectionists nor free traders."⁶⁵ "It is, in truth," Calhoun wrote to a kinsman as the Senate labored over the tariff in early March 1832, "hard to find a middle [sic] position, where the principle of protection is asserted to be essential on one side, and fatal on the other. It involves not the question of concession, but surrender."⁶⁶ In early July, a despairing Calhoun offered a gloomy précis of the Senate's action on the tariff:

We have spent a long & fruitless season. The Tariff Bill was late last evening ordered to the 3d. reading in the senate with many amendments all going to increase the burden on us. Every southern member voted against it including the South West, with the exception of the Senators from Louisiana. The question is no

longer one of free trade, but liberty and despotism. The hope of the country now rests on our gallant little State. Let every Carolinian do his duty. Those who do not join us now intend unqualified submission.⁶⁷

Senator Calhoun

In South Carolina, where antitariff sentiments had reached a fever pitch, Calhoun found it increasingly difficult to contain the deadly forces that he had unwittingly unleashed. Nullifiers gained control of the state legislature in the fall 1832 election. The new legislature promptly called for a nullification convention, which passed an ordinance declaring the 1828 and 1832 tariffs void as of February 1, 1833. The Ordinance of Nullification also warned that, if the administration resorted to coercion to collect the offensive duties, South Carolina would "proceed to organize a separate government." An irate Jackson ordered reinforcements to the federal installations surrounding Charleston Harbor but soon announced his support for a revised tariff. On December 10, he proclaimed nullification "incompatible with the existence of the Union."

Calhoun would help defuse this explosive situation, but not as vice president. Elected to the Senate to replace Robert Hayne, he resigned the vice-presidency on December 28, 1832, more than two months before his term was up. Except for a brief stint as secretary of state during John Tyler's administration, he spent the rest of his life in the Senate, valiantly defending his state and attempting to reconcile its interests with those of the nation at large. Undaunted by rumors that Jackson intended to try him for treason if the impasse over nullification resulted in an armed confrontation, Calhoun joined forces with Henry Clay to help guide through the Senate a revised tariff, acceptable to the southern states. The nullifiers, encouraged by the prospect of a more equitable tariff, and counseled by cool-headed emissaries from Virginia to show restraint, postponed the effective date of the ordinance until March 4. Jackson's supporters had, in the meantime, introduced a measure to force South Carolina's compliance with the old tariff, which passed the Senate by overwhelming margins. Calhoun and eight of his fellow senators stalked out of the chamber in protest when the Senate adopted the "Force bill," but Jackson never had occasion to employ its provisions against the nullifiers. The crisis passed after Congress approved both the revised tariff and the Force bill shortly before adjourning on March 3, 1833. Calhoun returned to South Carolina firmly convinced that nullification had "dealt the fatal blow" to the tariff.⁶⁸

For the next several years, Calhoun remained aloof from the Jacksonian coalition, which had become known as the Democratic party. But during Van Buren's administration, from 1837 to 1841, he set aside his longstanding aversion to "the Little Magician" and risked the wrath of his fellow South Carolinians to support the independent treasury plan, Van Buren's solution to the credit and currency problems that he and Calhoun believed responsible for the 1837 depression. Alarmed at the prospect that Whig presidential candidate William Henry Harrison would back tariff concessions for special interests,

Calhoun rejoined the Democrats in 1840 and began making plans to enter the 1844 presidential race.⁶⁹

Hoping to present himself as an independent candidate with no institutional affiliation, Calhoun resigned from the Senate on March 3, 1843. His campaign faltered, however, when several prominent Virginia Democrats backed Van Buren and the New York City convention followed suit. Calhoun consoled himself by focusing his attention on his farm, badly in debt after several years of depressed cotton prices, and his family, torn by a protracted financial disputes between Calhoun's son, Andrew Pickens Calhoun, and his son-in-law, Thomas Green Clemson. In mid-March 1844, he accepted President John Tyler's offer of an appointment to succeed Secretary of State Abel Upshur, who had been killed by an exploding cannon during an outing on the ship Princeton. Calhoun remained at the State Department until Tyler's term ended on March 3, 1845, participating in the final stages of the negotiations for the Texas Annexation Treaty.⁷⁰

Calhoun returned to the Senate in November 1845 and remained there for the rest of his life. Increasingly defensive about the institution of slavery as the abolition movement gained momentum, and agitated at the growing discord between the slaveholding and free states, he spoke, as he informed the Senate in 1847, as "a Southern man and a slaveholder." As secretary of state Calhoun had strongly supported the annexation of Texas. After Pennsylvania Representative David Wilmot offered his famous proviso as an amendment to an administration war bill, however, the South Carolina senator realized that the acquisition of additional territory would inevitably heighten the sectional conflict over slavery. The Wilmot Proviso, which would have barred slavery from all lands acquired from Mexico, pushed Calhoun into the anti-administration camp. He vehemently opposed the war policy of President James K. Polk, warning that the acquisition of Mexican territory, with its population of "pure Indians and by far the larger portion of the residue mixed blood," would corrupt the nation's culture and institutions.⁷¹ By 1850, the precarious balance between the slaveholding and free states was again at risk. California's petition to enter the Union as a free state threatened to upset the delicate equilibrium. Other unresolved issues, too, including slavery in the District of Columbia and the enforcement of fugitive slave laws, loomed large on the horizon during the final weeks of Calhoun's life. To resolve the impasse, Calhoun's old friend and rival, Henry Clay, on January 29, 1850, offered a series of proposals, collectively known as the Compromise of 1850. Clay proposed that California enter the Union as a free state and that Congress agree to impose no restrictions on slavery in the New Mexico and Utah territories. The compromise also provided that Congress would not prohibit or regulate slavery in the District of Columbia, would abolish the slave trade in the District, and would require northern states to comply with fugitive slave laws. Massachusetts Senator Daniel Webster sought Calhoun's support for the compromise, but the South Carolinian, vehemently opposed to abolishing the slave trade in the nation's capital and admitting California as a free state, refused to endorse the plan.

On March 4, a dispirited and emaciated Calhoun, his body so ravaged by tuberculosis that he could no longer walk unassisted and his once penetrating voice so weak that he could no longer speak, presented his final address to the Senate. Virginia Senator James Mason spoke for Calhoun, who sat nearby, his pitiful frame huddled in his chair. Only an immediate halt to antislavery agitation and a constitutional amendment to preserve the balance between North and South would save the Union, Calhoun warned. Even senators who had long considered Calhoun a disunionist were shocked when Mason pronounced his ultimatum: if the northern states were unwilling to reconcile their differences with the South "on the broad principle of justice and duty, say so; and let the States we both represent agree to separate and part in peace." Three days later, Senator Webster delivered his famous "Seventh of March" speech, a ringing plea for compromise and Union that Calhoun interrupted with a resolute, "No sir! the Union can be broken"—one of his last utterances in the Senate.⁷²

The Senate ultimately approved Clay's compromise, not as a package, but as separate items. Calhoun died on March 31, 1850, convinced that his beloved South would one day withdraw from the Union he had labored so long and hard to strengthen and preserve. Even in death, he was a controversial figure. Senator Thomas Hart Benton refused to speak at the April 5 memorial service in the Senate chamber; Calhoun was "not dead," he maintained. "There may be no vitality in his body, but there is in his doctrines." Senator Daniel Webster, one of the official mourners chosen by the Senate to accompany Calhoun's body to South Carolina, could not bring himself to perform this awkward and painful task. He took his leave from Calhoun at the Virginia landing as the funeral party departed for the South. Calhoun was buried in Charleston, in a crypt in St. Philip's churchyard.⁷³

Notes:

1. Clyde N. Wilson and W. Edwin Hemphill, eds., *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10 (Columbia, SC, 1977) pp. 199-203.
2. John C. Calhoun to James Monroe, June 23, 1826, *Calhoun Papers*, 10:132-35.
3. U.S., Congress, Senate, *The Senate, 1789-1989: Addresses on the History of the United States Senate*, by Robert C. Byrd, S. Doc. 100-20, 100th Cong., 1st sess., vol. 1, 1988, p. 88; U.S., Congress, Senate, *Journal*, 18th Cong., special session of March 4, 1825, pp. 271-74.
4. John Niven, *John C. Calhoun and the Price of Union* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1988), p. 10
5. Niven, pp. 1-12; for an account of the Regulator movement, see Richard Maxwell Brown, *The South Carolina Regulators* (Cambridge, 1963).
6. By the eighteenth century, the family had changed the spelling of their name, originally "Colquohoun" (after the Scottish clan of that name), with one branch of the family adopting the most commonly known spelling, "Calhoun," and the other spelling the name "Colhoun." Charles M. Wiltse, *John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1, *Nationalist, 1782-1828* (New York, 1968; reprint of 1944 ed.), p. 12; Niven, p. 20.
7. Wiltse, *John C. Calhoun: Nationalist*, p. 50.
8. Niven, pp. 21-34; Merrill D. Peterson, *The Great Triumvirate: Webster, Clay, and Calhoun* (New York, 1987), pp. 23-27.
9. James Sterling Young, *The Washington Community, 1800-1828* (New York, 1966), pp. 97-102.
10. Niven, pp. 34-35; Peterson, p. 23.
11. The Committee on Foreign Affairs did not become a standing committee of the House of

- Representatives until 1822. U.S., Congress, House of Representatives, *Guide to the Records of the United States House of Representatives at the National Archives, 1789-1989*, 100th Cong., 2d sess. (Washington, 1989), p. 135.
12. Peterson, p. 18; Niven, pp. 41-52; Harry Ammon, *James Monroe: The Quest for National Identity* (Charlottesville, VA, 1990; reprint of 1971 edition), p. 309; James F. Hopkins, "Election of 1824," in *History of American Presidential Elections, 1789-1968*, ed. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., and Fred L. Israel, vol. 1 (New York), 1971), p. 354.
13. Peterson, pp. 18, 39.
14. Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York, 1991), pp. 76-79; Peterson, p. 49; Niven, pp. 51-57. President James Madison vetoed the "Bonus Bill" on Constitutional grounds.
15. Niven, pp. 58-60; Ammon, pp. 357-60, 470; Richard W. Barsness, "John C. Calhoun and the Military Establishment, 1817-1825," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 50 (Autumn 1966), pp. 43-53; Wiltse, *John C. Calhoun: Nationalist*, p. 140.
16. Young, pp. 230-31.
17. Allan Nevins, ed., *The Diary of John Quincy Adams, 1794-1845* (New York, 1951), p. 354; Wiltse, *John C. Calhoun: Nationalist*, pp. 208-209.
18. Peterson, pp. 87-88.
19. Barsness, pp. 43-53; Ammon, p. 470.
20. Ammon, pp. 470-72; Peterson, pp. 88-89, 93; Niven, pp. 78-79. See also Chapter 9, "Richard Mentor Johnson," of this volume, pp. 6-7.
21. Barsness, pp. 43-53; Niven, pp. 86-93.
22. Peterson, pp. 116-31; Hopkins, pp. 349-81; Niven, pp. 93-109.
23. Peterson, p. 130.
24. John C. Calhoun to J.G. Swift, in *Calhoun Papers*, 10:9-10.
25. Niven, p. 116; for Calhoun's caveat that he was "without experience, which only can give the requisite skill in presiding," see his March 4, 1825, inaugural address, U.S., Congress, Senate, *Journal*, 18th Cong., special sess. of March 4, 1825, pp. 272-73.
26. Peterson, p. 136.
27. For a list of committee chairmen during the 18th Congress, see U.S., Congress, Senate, *Annals of Congress*, 18th Cong., 1st sess., p. 27; a comprehensive list of committee chairs from 1789 through 1992 appears in Byrd, *The Senate, 1789-1989*, vol. 4, *Historical Statistics, 1789-1992* (Washington, 1993), pp. 522-81.
28. Peterson, p. 136; Niven, p. 114. Macon had served as a member of the Foreign Relations Committee in the 18th Congress; Virginia Senator James Barbour, a Crawford Republican who served as the committee's chairman during that Congress, had resigned in March 1825, to accept an appointment as secretary of war. *Annals of Congress*, 18th Cong., 1st sess., p. 27; U.S., Congress, Senate, *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1771-1989*, S. Doc. 100-34, 100th Cong., 2d sess., 1989, pp. 574-75.
29. Peterson, p. 136.
30. Niven, pp. 113-15; Peterson, pp. 136-40; Robert V. Remini, *Martin Van Buren and the Making of the Democratic Party* (New York, 1959), pp. 105-13.
31. Thomas Hart Benton, *Thirty Years View; or, A History of the Working of the American Government for Thirty Years, from 1820-1850* (New York, 1871; reprint of 1854 edition), vol. 1, pp. 65-69; Remini, *Martin Van Buren and the making of the Democratic Party*, pp. 105-13. The Senate confirmed the appointments of John Sergeant and Richard Clark Adams as delegates to the Panama Congress by a vote of 24 to 20.
32. U.S., Congress, *Register of Debates in Congress*, 19th Cong., 1st sess., pp. 384-406; Benton, 1:78; John C. Calhoun to Micah Sterling, February 4, 1826, in *Calhoun Papers*, 10:72-73.
33. Robert V. Remini, *Henry Clay: Statesman for the Union* (New York, 1991), pp. 292-93; Niven, pp. 114-16; Peterson, pp. 140-41; *Register of Debates in Congress*, 19th Cong., 1st sess., pp. 384-406.
34. *Register of Debates in Congress*, 19th Cong., 1st sess., pp. 384-407. The amendment was sent to the House of Representatives, where it died in committee.
35. Remini, *Henry Clay*, pp. 293-95; Peterson, pp. 140-42.
36. *Annals of Congress*, 18th Cong., 1st sess., pp. 114-17; U.S., Congress, Senate, *Journal*, 18th Cong., 1st

- sess., pp. 106, 114, 125.
37. *Register of Debates in Congress*, 19th Cong., 1st sess., pp. 525-26, 571-73.
38. Senator John Holmes of Maine noted, in his April 15, 1826 remarks, that proposed rules changes "had proceeded from an intimate personal friend of the Vice President, which will itself contradict the presumption that any conduct" of Calhoun's "had induced the proposition." His remarks brought an immediate disclaimer from the ever-erratic Randolph that he had "offered the resolution in no such character...of the personal friend or enemy of any gentleman on this floor with one exception." *Register of Debates in Congress*, 19th Cong., 1st sess., pp. 571-74.
39. *Register of Debates in Congress*, pp. 754-59.
40. Editorial note and summary, *Calhoun Papers*, 10:91.
41. "Patrick Henry"'s essays appear in *Calhoun Papers*, 10:91-96; 113-27; 165:75; 175;-87; 188-97; for the "Onslow" essays, see pp. 99-104; 135-47; 147-155; 208-215; 215-21; 223-33. See also the editors' introduction, xix-xxx.
42. *Calhoun Papers*, 10:xxi.
43. *Register of Debates in Congress*, 20th Cong., 1st sess., pp. 278-341 ("Powers of the Vice President").
44. John C. Calhoun to Andrew Jackson, June 4, 1826, *Calhoun Papers*, 10:110-11; Peterson, pp. 151-52; Niven, pp. 68-71, 119-21.
45. Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York, 1990), pp. 73-74.
46. John C. Calhoun to Lt. James Edward Colhoun, December 24, 1826, *Calhoun Papers*, 10:238-40.
47. Alexandria *Phoenix Gazette*, December 28, 1826, *Calhoun Papers*, 10:241-42.
48. John C. Calhoun to the secretary of the Senate, December 29, 1826, *Calhoun Papers*, 10:243.
49. Niven, pp. 124-26; editorial note, *Calhoun Papers*, 10:246.
50. John C. Calhoun to the Rev. Moses Waddel, February 24, 1827, *Calhoun Papers*, 10:266-67; Niven, pp. 125-26.
51. Niven, pp. 131-37; Peterson, pp. 159-61.
52. John C. Calhoun to Andrew Jackson, July 10, 1828, *Calhoun Papers*, 10:395-97.
53. Robert V. Remini, "Election of 1828," in Schlesinger and Israel, eds., pp. 413-33.
54. Niven, pp. 154-78; Peterson, pp. 169-70.
55. Niven, pp. 165-69.
56. Peterson, p. 170.
57. Byrd, *The Senate, 1789-1989*, vol. 3, *Classic Speeches, 1830-1993* (Washington, 1994), pp. 1-77; Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Freedom, 1822-1832* (New York, 1981), pp. 232-33; Peterson, pp. 170-83; Niven, pp. 169-72.
58. Remini, *Jackson and the Course of American Freedom*, p. 233
59. *Ibid.*, pp. 185-86; Peterson pp. 233-37.
60. Remini, *Jackson and the Course of American Freedom*, pp. 240-47; Peterson, pp. 187-89; Niven, pp. 174-75. For the Calhoun-Jackson correspondence regarding the Seminole War investigation, and an account of Calhoun's subsequent publication of the exchange, see Clyde N. Wilson, ed., *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 11 (Columbia, SC, 1978), pp. 94-96, 159-225, 285, 334-38.
61. Remini, *Jackson and the Course of American Freedom*, pp. 161-63, 320-21; Peterson, pp. 183-85; Niven, pp. 167-69, 174. For further discussion of this incident, see Chapter 8 of this volume, "Martin Van Buren," pp. 8-9.
62. Niven, pp. 180-84; Charles M. Wiltse, *John C. Calhoun, vol. 2, Nullifier, 1829-1839* (New York, 1968; reprint of 1949 ed.), pp. 110-20; John C. Calhoun to Samuel D. Ingham, July 31, 1831, *Calhoun Papers*, 11:441-45.
63. Remini, *Jackson and the Course of American Democracy*, p. 347.
64. *Ibid.*, pp. 347-49; Niven, pp. 185-87; Peterson, p. 203; *Register of Debates in Congress*, 20th Cong., 1st sess., pp. 278-341.
65. Peterson, pp. 203-9.
66. John C. Calhoun to Francis W. Pickens, March 2, 1832, *Calhoun Papers*, 11:558-59.
67. John C. Calhoun to Samuel D. Ingham, July 8, 1832, *Calhoun Papers*, 11:602-3.
68. Niven, pp. 189-99; Richard E. Ellis, *The Union at Risk: Jacksonian Democracy, States' Rights, and the*

Nullification Crisis (New York, 1987), pp. 74-91, and *passim*.

69. Niven, pp. 200-58.

70. *Ibid.*, pp. 259-82.

71. *Ibid.*, pp. 295-313.

72. *Ibid.*, pp. 339-45; Peterson, pp. 449-66.

73. Peterson, pp. 467-69; Niven, pp. 343-45.